

Testimony before the State of Connecticut Appropriation Committee

February 23, 2014

Good Evening Representative Walker and Senator Bye and Members of the Appropriation Committee,

My name is Elizabeth Fraser; for the past 12 years I have been working as Program Director and Early Childhood Coordinator for Middletown Even Start, a two-generation learning program. As of today, I am transitioning into a new position as a Policy Analyst for The Connecticut Association for Human Services.

My colleague from CAHS has submitted testimony on CAHS positions concerning the Governors Early Education Initiatives and the importance of the OEC becoming part of CT statute.

So for tonight, I am testifying as an exiting Even Start Director. I am speaking on behalf of every family that I have had the privilege of working with, as well as many families that I will never meet. Each of these families includes an infant or toddler whose primary caregiver has not yet completed high school. As can be expected, they are some of Connecticut's most vulnerable families.

On behalf of these families I am requesting that:

- Funding for two -generation learning programs be expanded to include more CT communities
- The Governor's "Baby Chet "Initiative be included in the Appropriation Committee Budget.
- The Office of Early Childhood is voted into law, permanently establishing a cohesive system to advance the important work of early childhood and families.

Funding for Two Generational Learning Programs be expanded

The prevalence of parents lacking high school and post- secondary education in Connecticut is striking. *The United States Census , American Fact Finder* estimates that from 2010-2012 approximately 5,000 babies were born in Connecticut each year to a mother who had not yet completed high school. An additional 8,500 babies were born to a mother who did not have any post -secondary education. Many of these parents are single, struggling financially and, due to lack of education and lack of infant/toddler care, have limited opportunities. Although some supports for families are available, they are scattered throughout agencies and are difficult to navigate. Very few of the available supports include access to the quality infant/ toddler care which would allow for a parent to complete his or her educational goals and for the child to flourish. It is no wonder that the cycle of generational poverty continues unchecked.

Two Generation learning models, such as Connecticut Even Start, address the challenges faced by these families. Grant guidelines specify that programs must address and be accountable for parent outcomes, child outcomes and family/ parenting outcomes. The three programs remaining from the original federal grant provide education for both parent and child **and** provide a portal to the supports and community programs needed for family stabilization. A parenting education component ensures that parents have access to information and tools needed to become a partner in their child's education.

Unlike many programs, two generation programs have both short term and long term impact. In the short term, we are educating parents toward their educational goals and meaningful employment. Children are receiving a strong start in quality programs and those with suspected developmental delays are identified early. In the long term, families are more stable, children are transitioned into quality

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early education programs and most important, parents take an active role in their child's educational progress. As we know, a parent's involvement in their child's education is directly correlated to the success of the child.

Nationally, the role and importance of two generation programs is getting much attention. Ascend of The Aspen Institute, The W. K. Kellogg Foundation and The Annie E. Casey Foundation are all recognizing the benefits of integrating "two-generational" programs into the system of supports available for vulnerable families. At the 2013 Aspen Institute *Forum on Innovations in Early Childhood*, Carla Thomson of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation stated, "The lens is families and children. We're thinking two-gen because children don't live outside the context of their families"

The Even Start Coalition, with input and guidance from the Office of Early Childhood, has been working on a strategic planning model that would push two generation programs forward and secure a more intentional place in Connecticut's future early childhood system. The process was facilitated by Judy Goldfarb, formally of the Hartford Area Child Care Collaborative. A report on the work completed to date is available by request from the Office of Early Childhood.

The Even Start Coalition applauds the Governor and this Committee for including the Even Start Two-Generation Family Learning Program in the 2013-2015 Biennial Budget. By doing so, Connecticut is on the forefront of a national movement towards two- gen learning. Now is the time to grow the program and provide access to many more families.

Include the Baby Chet program in the Appropriation Budget.

The "Baby Chet" program is a smart way to ensure that every child begins their life with the possibility, *the thought*, that he or she will be receiving post-secondary education. This program is, in effect, a declaration from the State of CT that that each child deserves and needs post- secondary education.

A recently published CFED report entitled, *Investing in Hope, a Two Generational Approach to Asset Building*, reports that, "Children from low or moderate income households with savings between \$1.00 and \$499.00 are 3x more likely to attend college and 4x more likely to graduate from college." That is a great return on investment. In addition much of this investment will be coming back to the Connecticut in the form of tuition.

Although the CT monetary contribution for each child is small, the idea is large. Many of the parents that I work with desperately want their children to attend college but don't have a plan for how this might happen. Most have a difficult time seeing beyond their food bill or heating bill or rent. Baby Chet provides the vehicle for parents to contribute to the future education of their child. But, of more importance, it concretely establishes the *idea* that a parent *should* contribute and should start early.

Over 18 years, the initial CT contribution of \$250.00, combined with a parental contribution of just \$10.00 a month, will grow these accounts to several thousand dollars. While this is certainly not enough to pay for a degree, it is more than enough to demonstrate commitment to each child's future

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Permanently Establish the Office of Early Childhood

One of the most promising achievements from the 2013 Legislative Session was the work done to establish the Office of Early Childhood. The tangled web of infrastructure and disparate services once in place is being restructured to provide an integrated and accountable system.

But the work is not done. Now is the time to vote the Office of Early Childhood into Connecticut Statute, and quickly, so that the positive changes that are being made are permanently established as part of Connecticut's educational system.

A recent ASCEND Report, *Gateways to Two Generations*, stresses that "an adaptive infrastructure and cohesive systems may be two of the most important factors to ensuring successful implementation, and strong outcomes for both parents and children." Common Sense tells us the same thing.

This is what we all want, "strong outcomes for parents and children." With the OEC firmly in place we can be assured that we are moving in a direction that provides the cohesive environment necessary to ensure this can happen.

Connecticut Office of Early Childhood Division of Early Care and Education

Even Start Family Learning Program

Locations: Middletown, New London & Torrington, CT

For over a decade the Connecticut Even Start Family Learning Program has been providing comprehensive two-generation supports to help create positive outcomes for disenfranchised families that are most in need and hardest to serve.

This state funded Two-Generation Program provides families access to comprehensive family-centered education programs and the training and support they need to create a literate home environment, enhance the academic achievement of their children and increase the parents' economic opportunities.

It is designed to integrate early childhood education and education for parents of young children into a project that builds on existing community resources with collaboration of multiple agencies that serve families at the core of this outreach. Even Start was specifically developed to improve family literacy in low-income areas.



Primary Program Components

Local Even Start programs integrate the following primary components:

1. *Early Childhood and/or School-Age Education* - The early childhood component includes children from birth through age 5 and is based on developmentally appropriate activities and curriculum.
2. *Adult Education* - The adult education component encompasses basic skills and English as a second language. It is designed so that adult students of all abilities will be equipped to think critically and creatively, set goals and solve problems, and acquire interpersonal skills that are needed for participation in society
3. *Interactive Literacy & Home Visiting Support* - The parent and child interaction component provides time for parents and children to work and play together as a family unit. The reciprocal learning that takes place during this time offers parents and children a chance to become true partners in their education and to transfer the new learning into the home.
4. *Home Visits to Support Educational Programs* - The home visit component supports families in transferring learning from the other program components to their daily lives. The home visitor acts as a coach or mentor to guide the family in developing its own literacy-based family activities.
5. *Parent Education and Support* - The time parents spend together blends the goals of parent support groups and parent education to meet the needs of the families in the program. This component provides time and a safe place to educate and inform parents, to provide opportunities for mutual support, to offer advocacy services to families and to study particular topics related to being a parent.

Ascend Continuum: Parent-Child Focused

Sector: Public

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